

"B" relative to the differences between the present invention and the recited prior art. As such, those comments are incorporated by reference herein. Applicant also contends that the present invention is patentably distinguishable, as now amended, from the prior art combination.

The Ward patent describes attachment mechanisms formed of various hook-and-loop VELCRO (TM) elements identified with reference numerals 28 and 30. The problem addressed by the Ward patent is quite different than that solved by the present invention. The Ward patent is particularly concerned with being able to hold the cover during the expansion of the airbag without it being secured to a fixed point on the vehicle. In contrast, in the present invention, the cover is maintained permanently on the vehicle through the use of the flap of flexible material (hinge 12). As was stated in the independent claims, the flap is permanently affixed to said vehicle bodywork such that said body is in hinged relationship to said vehicle bodywork. The cover is completely retracted in the Ward patent while the cover is only partially retracted in the present invention. Applicant respectfully contends that one having ordinary skill in the art would not be able to solve the problems addressed by the present invention from the disclosure of the Ward patent. Even if the person with ordinary skill in the art would have reviewed the Ward patent, such person would not have developed the structure of the present invention.

In particular, the hook-and-loop elements 28 and 30 of the Ward patent do not function to connect the same components as in the present invention. In the Ward patent, the hook-and-loop elements 28 and 30 connect the cover 26 and the airbag 22. In contrast, in the present invention, the hook-and-loop elements 11A and 11B connect, on the one hand, the cover, and on the other hand, the bodywork.

Applicant does not understand the reference made by the Examiner to "the door which is the

vehicle bodywork." It would appear that the door 26 is simply a cover over the exterior of the airbag. If in fact the "door 26" is the vehicle bodywork, then there would be disclosure in the Ward patent which would reflect the limitation that the flap is "permanently affixed to said vehicle bodywork such that said body is in hinged relationship to said vehicle bodywork." The bodywork of the present invention includes the housing into which the airbag is received. As recited in independent Claim 20, it is stated that "said housing receiving said airbag therein". In the present invention, the term "bodywork" relates to the area in which the cover is positioned and not to the cover itself.

Functionally, the present invention is quite different from the disclosure of the Ward patent since the hook-and-loop elements of the Ward patent and the hook-and-loop elements of the present invention are entirely different. According to the present invention, these hook-and-loop material elements function to keep the cover closed on the bodywork before the airbag is deployed. In the Ward patent, these hook-and-loop material elements function to prevent the cover from being projected into the passenger compartment during the expansion of the airbag.

Relative to the prior art combination, if the person having ordinary skill in the art had used the disclosure of the Ward patent and applied to the disclosure of the Steimke patent, the person with ordinary skill in the art would have equipped the airbags described with hook-and-loop material elements located on the airbags and on the cover in order to reinforce the role of the hinge. Without hindsight analysis, these hook-and-loop material elements would not have been used as mechanisms to support the cover prior to deployment or would not have been used so as to support the cover against the bodywork. As such, Applicant respectfully contends that the combination of the Ward patent with that of the Steimke patent would not disclose or make obvious the present invention to

one having ordinary skill in the art.

Importantly, relative to the prior art combination and the present amendments, it is important to note that the "flap of flexible material" is now identified as integrally formed with and extending from the first edge of the body. This structure is neither shown nor suggested by the prior art combination. In this Steimke patent, the hinge is made of an attached element and is not integrally formed with the body.


Relative to the combination of the Ward, Steimke and Hagen patents, a hinge is not provided. The covers are held during the expansion of the airbag by the hook-and-loop material elements acting together with the air bag, or by a strap 90 connected to a fixed point on the vehicle (as shown in the Hagen patent). Without the hinge element, as defined by the independent claims of the present invention, the prior art combination would simply not show nor make obvious the structure of the present invention. Also, as stated earlier in the previous amendments, it is important to note that the cover comprises at least two distinctive layers 8 and 9. As a result of these two layers, it is possible to provide one with a shaping and rigidification function while the other layer can be used so as to allow for the formation of the hinge at the area of one of its edges by compression molding or otherwise. The fixation of the hook-and-loop material elements 11A onto the body 2 is also made easier by this two-layer form of the cover.

On this basis, Applicant respectfully contends that independent Claims 17 and 20 are now in a proper condition for allowance. Additionally, those claims which are dependent upon these independent claims should similarly be in condition for allowance. Reconsideration of the rejections

is requested and allowance of the claims at an early date is earnestly solicited. Since no additional claims have been added above those originally paid for, no additional fee is required.

Respectfully submitted,

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